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STRAWBERRY SEASON IS HERE

A radio conversation between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, and Mr. George Darrow and Mr. W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, broadcast Thursday, May 19, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associate radio stations.

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WALLACE KADDERLY:

Here we are in Washington. With strawberries to right of us and strawberries to left of us. Samples of some of the new varieties the Department of Agriculture has helped to develop for strawberry growers. And that's the sign of course to many of you regular Farm and Home Hour listeners that George Darrow, and Ruth Van Deman, and W. R. Beattie are on hand for another of their strawberry roundtables. I'm very glad to be in on this year's round table. Because Mr. Darrow, I met you first, some years ago out in Oregon at Corvallis when you were starting your strawberry breeding work on the West Coast.

GEORGE M. DARROW:

Yes, I was spending a lot of my time out there on the beaches along the Pacific.

VAN DEMAN:

Beach combing?

DARROW:

Combing for productive perfect-flowered plants of the wild strains to use in our crosses.

KADDERLY:

But you never found them, did you?

DARROW:

No, not a single one. But maybe I will some day - - - down on the coast of Chile - - - or over on Robinson Crusoe's Island, if I get that far.

KADDERLY:

You haven't crossed the last frontier then in this strawberry work.

DARROW:

Not by any means. But every year sees us a little farther along in getting varieties of finer quality, and better adapted to different regions, and to certain purposes. Take these berries here I brought over yesterday from the Eastern Shore of Maryland - this sample of Blakemore, for instance - - -

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Than which there isn't a finer berry for preserving.

DARROW:

That's what we had in mind of course. We wanted a firm, tart, well-shaped, bright-colored berry that would hold its own in the heat of the preserving kettle.

( over )

VAN DEMAN:

And you certainly did it. The Blakemore measures up every time in our laboratories.

DARROW:

Yes, the berries are all right, but the plants have one fault.

W. R. BEATTIE:

They have a tendency to turn yellow. I've noticed that in my own garden.

DARROW:

That's it, Beattie. There's a yellow streak in their ancestry that shows up every now and then. From perfectly good green plants will come yellow sports.

BEATTIE:

But this yellow foliage doesn't seem to make the plants bear any less.

DARROW:

It will the next spring. Fortunately there are some Blakemore stocks in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Maryland, that yellow very slowly or not at all. So by next winter there'll be enough of this good green Blakemore stock for all new plantings.

KADDERLY:

Mr. Darrow, I don't see any Redheart among these varieties you brought in.

DARROW:

No, Mr. Kadderly, you'll have to go back to the Northwest to see Redheart.

KADDERLY:

Yes, I know, George Waldo has them in his test plots at Oregon State College.

DARROW:

And Redheart is now a leading strawberry for freezing and canning in that part of the country.

BEATTIE:

But you originated it here in the East.

DARROW:

Yes, but it doesn't do well in this climate. That's what I had in mind a moment ago when I said we were trying to develop finer berries suited to every part of the country. I have a kind of democratic ideal in this strawberry work. I think that here in this country, where the earliest settlers found strawberries growing wild, we should develop enough varieties so that everybody can have berries of the finest flavor.

BEATTIE:

Amen.

VAN DEMAN:

Mr. Beattie, you can say amen. You're the only one of us here, I think, Mr. Darrow excepted of course, who has a strawberry patch on his own land.

H. R. BAUKHAGE:

But he isn't the only one who knows a good strawberry when he eats it.

BEATTIE:

Hello, Baukhage. Come on in on this. We're glad to have you.

BAUKHAGE:

Well, as usual I've been sampling. And Miss Van Deman, I haven't found the shortcake yet.

VAN DEMAN:

Sorry, no shortcakes this time. Just strawberries au naturel.

BAUKHAGE:

Well, Mr. Darrow, if you want just a newsman's opinion on your berries again.

DARROW:

Most certainly.

BAUKHAGE:

I think this variety you call Fairfax is about the best. I believe that's the same one I chose before.

DARROW:

Very likely. Fairfax is a rather sweet berry.

BEATTIE:

About 75 out of every 100 persons want that kind.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, I'm in the 25 who like more of a tart flavor. And I want real strawberry aroma too.

BEATTIE:

Dorsett here fills that bill. And it's a fine grower too.

DARROW:

Yes, Dorsett's proving a very good berry. As for the real strawberry aroma, Miss Van Deman, of course everybody wants that. But it's one of the most elusive things you can try to breed into a strawberry variety. We get it into our varieties through the wild eastern meadow berries. They're the most aromatic of all. The western beach berries add stamina and other fine qualities. But they have only very delicate aroma. So some of our modern berries, which are a combination of these two strains, have a fine aroma, and others have very little.

BEATTIE:

And some that have it when picked fresh from the vines, lose it on the way to market.

DARROW:

True. But we've got more new varieties coming along that will keep their aroma even when they're shipped a long distance. I hope they'll have just about everything.

VAN DEMAN:

And what do you and Mr. Beattie call everything in a strawberry?  
What's your standard?

DARROW:

Well, I'd put resistance to diseases first. No matter how fine the flavor a strawberry may have, to succeed commercially and even for the home gardener, the plants must withstand disease.

BEATTIE:

And they must be vigorous growers. Put out enough runners to propagate well.

DARROW:

Yes, that's for the plants. For the berries themselves, they must have fine dessert quality.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, as our eating test here shows means different things to different people.

DARROW:

Yes, but whether you like them sweet or sub-acid, we can get finer flavored berries than many of those now being grown. And I want them to be fine to look at. Fine color, running from scarlet to crimson, and uniform in shape.

BEATTIE:

And good sized. Everybody likes a big berry.

DARROW:

Yes, we can raise our present standard for size considerably. Sooner or later we'll have plenty of strawberries that will run 40 or maybe even 20 to a quart.

VAN DEMAN:

M-m-m--20 to a quart---that's when 5 strawberries make a serving. You showed us some like that at Beltsville once.

DARROW:

That was an unusually good strawberry season. Plenty of rain and good strong plants from the year before.

BEATTIE:

Season certainly has a lot to do with size of berries and yield.

DARROW:

And locality too of course. We select our new varieties as good bearers. But the yield varies all the way from 50 to 150 bushel crates to the acre, depending on where they're grown. That's one reason reports from our cooperators in the field are of such importance to us. I've visited about 15 of them this spring. And I only wish I could see them all. I've just had a particularly satisfactory report from P. H. Shephard, at Mountain Grove, Missouri. By the way, Mr. Kadderly, it's on a new Redheart cross.

KADDERLY:

Any time you want us to give it a taste test, just let us know.

VAN DEMAN:

And if it's good for preserving we'll be glad to try it out and pass the word along to women who're making strawberry preserves and jam in their own kitchens.

DARROW:

I'll certainly see that you get some.

VAN DEMAN:

And thank you very much, Mr. Darrow and Mr. Beattie, for all this good strawberry conversation and these good strawberries to eat.

BEATTIE:

We'll be with you again next May, if you want us.

VAN DEMAN:

I'll put that right down on the Household Calendar. And, Wallace, in case some of our listeners would like Mr. Darrow's bulletins about strawberries I brought these copies along.

KADDERLY:

A good idea. Thank you, Ruth. This seems to be a regular library on strawberries. Strawberry Culture - South Atlantic and Gulf Coast Regions. Strawberry Culture - Western United States. Strawberry Varieties in the United States. Everbearing Strawberries. Mr. Darrow, I take it you'll be glad to send copies of any or all of these to people who want to grow strawberries?

DARROW:

Yes. Just as long as the supply lasts.

KADDERLY:

All right. Farm and Home friends--I won't repeat all the titles again, but if any of you want to know about growing strawberries anywhere in the United States all you need to do is write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture here in Washington, and you'll get the one of Mr. Darrow's bulletins suited to your region.

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